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SUBJECT: ALP'S UPCOMING NATIONAL CONFERENCE

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CANBERRA 00000673 001.3 OF 002

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR JAMES COLE. REASON: 1.4 (C) and (D)

11. (C/NF) Summary: The ruling Australian Labor party's (ALP) National Conference is preparing for its first major gathering since its election victory in 2007. Usually held every three years, the July 30 - August 1 conference will update the ALP's National Platform. A draft platform has been prepared which will be debated, amended and voted on by the 400 convention delegates. A large part of the draft platform has been agreed on behind the scenes, but ALP figures predict there will be genuine debate on industrial relations, trade, procurement, aged pension eligibility and rights for same-sex couples. ALP affiliated unions, which comprise 50 percent of delegates, are likely to push the ALP to go further with its industrial relations laws. According to a party spokesperson, the ALP National Platform will continue to strongly support the Australia/US Alliance. The Rudd government is hopeful that its position on missile defense cooperation with the United States, as set forth in the latest Defense White Paper, does not come under left wing criticism at the conference. End Summary.

ROLE OF CONFERENCE

12. (SBU) The 45th ALP National Conference will be held July 30 - August 1 2009 in Sydney. It will be the first major gathering of the party at a national level since its November 2007 national elections win. The conference will debate and update its National Platform. It will also elect an ALP National Executive which is the final arbiter of internal party disputes. There will be 400 delegates including the four federal ALP Leaders and 8 State and territory Leaders. The number of delegates from each state are based approximately on population. For example, New South Wales will seat 111 delegates and the Northern Territory seven. In accordance with the ALP's affirmative action rules, at least one third of the delegates will be women. Affiliated unions are entitled to 50 percent of delegates (despite only having 19 percent membership of the national workforce. Until 2002, they were entitled to 60 percent of delegates.) The 11 chapters of the platform include chapters on the economy, foreign affairs, health and climate change. A draft national platform, prepared by the ALP National Policy Committee, will be presented to Conference for debate. Historically, ALP national conferences have been heated affairs, but over the last two decades they have become increasingly stage managed with much debate worked out behind the scenes by the factions.

STRONG SUPPORT FOR US ALLIANCE

13. (SBU) On July 16, the Chair of the National Policy

Committee, federal MP Mark Dreyfus, briefed diplomatic observers who will be attending the conference. Dreyfus maintained that there would be little controversy over foreign policy. The platform's strong commitment to the Australia/US Alliance will almost certainly remain. The current platform, adopted in 2007, states:

-- The United States remains our closest security ally and a vital global partner. Labor is firmly committed to maintain and strengthen Australia's close relationship with the United States, a relationship founded on our people's common democratic values and their commitment to fostering international peace and security.

-- Labor believes in the centrality of the alliance to Australia's national security requirements in critical areas such as intelligence on terrorism, defense equipment and broader strategic stabilization in East Asia, where great power tensions between other regional states remain problematic.

-- Labor does not, however, believe that the alliance equals the totality of Australia's national security requirements as these must also be met in the other two pillars of Labor's approach - the UN multilateral system and our policy of comprehensive engagement in Asia. Labor continues to support the United Nations process and opposes policies that undermine the integrity and effectiveness of the United Nations.

UNIONS WILL MAKE NOISES

14. (SBU) Dreyfus predicted that unions would make representations on trade, government procurement, and proposed changes to the aged pension. However, he added

CANBERRA 00000673 002.3 OF 002

there is always tension between the unions and the parliamentary party given the latter must govern in the national interest, not merely in the interests of unions. One ALP MP told us that rights for same-sex relationships would probably be raised. The Draft Platform is a pared down 139 pages, compared with the current platform of 400 pages. Dreyfus says the Draft Platform emphasizes the responsibilities of government and the challenges imposed by the global economic downturn.

15. (SBU) Comment: The agenda of the unions is likely to reflect policies adopted by the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) Congress in June 2009. For example, the ACTU wants preferential treatment for Australian suppliers in government procurement (similar to what has been adopted in New South Wales), a freeze on free trade agreements and scrapping of special oversight for the building and construction industry. In the 1980s uranium mining was a big issue at ALP National Conferences. At the 2007 National Conference, the ALP abandoned its "three mines" uranium policy, despite significant opposition. Recently, the government approved a fourth uranium mine so it cannot be ruled out that this sparks debate.

DEFENSE WHITE PAPER ISSUE

16. (C/NF) Comment continued: Despite Dreyfus' assurances on the Australia/U.S. relationship, and as noted in reftel, the Rudd government is holding its breath that its position on missile defense cooperation with the United States, as set forth in the latest Defense White Paper, does not come under left wing criticism at the convention. To date, we have not seen any indication that the missile defense issue is on the ALP left's agenda. End Comment.